LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PENYENGAT ISLAND, RIAU

The Works of Raja Ali Haji

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Abstract

Malay society has a variety of historical heritages one of which is Malay manuscripts. They are valuable treasures containing knowledge that informs the world about the soul, spirit, thinking, and civilisation of the Malays, and that will be of interest to future generations. This article introduces the works of Raja Ali Haji of Penyengat Island (c. 1808 – c. 1873), one of the great Malay writers of the nineteenth century, and will briefly discuss the history of Bugis domination in the Johor-Riau Lingga region in the eighteenth century. The discussion will also cover the development of Malay historiography and literary activities in the early nineteenth century to which Raja Ali Haji and other scholars brought about significant changes. The findings of the study reveal that he was a prominent figure not only in the aspect of religion but also in literature, language, politics, and history. His prowess was inherited by his family and descendants who formed a movement known as the Rusydiah Club to stimulate feelings of nationalism among the community with the view of opposing the Dutch in Riau.

Keywords: Historiography, Literary Works, Malay Manuscripts, Raja Ali Haji, Penyengat Island Riau.

Introduction

Historiography in the Malay World is not a new field. In fact, history has been written about the Malay World since the fourteenth century

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or earlier, although some scholars hold the view that historical writings did not exist in the so-called 'classical' or 'traditional' period. For instance, Bottoms and Winstedt argue that the earliest writings such as *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai, Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), *Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa* and *Misa Melayu* were neither a science nor an art but merely entertainment.[2] They argue that such writings contain irrational matters, that is, they are full of myths, legends, fantasies and superstitions and, hence, are more closely related to literature.

There are other opinions on this matter. Roolvink, for example, divides Southeast Asian historiographies into two types: first, those containing many superstitions, and second, those containing personal experiences, especially of people involved in past events.[3] One argument is that during this period, Malay historiography was related to literature, and was known as 'historical literature.' This is because many of the literary works contained mainly stories related to historical events. In fact, there is no term in traditional dictionaries for 'history' except the words '*silsilah*' (geneaology), '*hikayat*' (annals), and '*kisah riwayat*' (chronicles).[4]

Although Malay historical consciousness was not seen to be systematic and scientific, the people did have a system of beliefs based on religious myths, legends and fables. They put this legacy into writing so that future generations would know their origins and predecessors. There apparently was no systematic collection of sources, neither was there a formal technique of historical scholarship at that time. History was written in a general fashion, without detailed expositions. This is because the scribes were not overly concerned with the forms and purposes of historical writings. Their objectives were to obey the rulers, to use historical ideas for the guidance of their society, and to satisfy the cultural needs of the

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[2] J.C. Bottoms, "Malay Historical Sources: A Bibliographical Note", in Soedjatmoko (ed.), *An Introduction to Indonesian Historiography* (Cornell University Press: New York, 1965), 180.

[3] See Mohd Nor Long, "Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai dan Sejarah Melayu: Satu Perbandingan Bentuk Pensejarahan," *Jernal Sejarah* VII (1968/69), 58.

[4] Drs. Teuku Ibrahim Alfian, "Pengertian Kata 'Sejarah'", *Jebat* 2 (1972/73), 99.

people. These forms and aims of historical writing remained unchanged until the nineteenth century.

A Brief History of Bugis Domination in the Johor-Riau Lingga Region

According to Gene Ammarell in his *Bugis Navigation*, the Bugis are a group in Malay society who settled down in the South Sulawesi, and were among the most famous sea-faring peoples in the Malay Archipelago. They emerged as a sea power in the tenth century CE.[5] At that time the port of Makassar was considered to be the centre of international trade, and with the downfall of the port of Malacca in 1511, the indigenous traders, Malay-speaking communities from the Archipelago, and foreign traders (Chinese, Europeans, Arabs and Indians) migrated to the port of Makassar.[6]

Following the Portuguese invasion and conquest of Malacca in 1511, Sultan Mahmud Shah and his son Sultan Ahmad who were the rulers established their own kingdom in Johor. They established their empire and successfully administered it. But on 3rd September 1699, after the death of Sultan Mahmud II[7] who did not leave a successor, Bendahara Abdul Jalil stepped into the dead ruler's shoes and became Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah IV. Raja Kechil, a Minangkabau, claimed to be a son of Sultan Mahmud and wanted to be the king of Johor.[8] He was crowned as Sultan of Johor and became Sultan

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[5] Gene Ammarell, *Bugis Navigation,* Monograph 48, (New Heaven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 1999), 10.

[6] *Ibid*., 6.

[7] Sultan Mahmud, Johor's young and sadistic ruler was killed by his nobles. According to Watson Andaya and Virginia Matheson, a Dutch envoy recognised Sultan Mahmud as the last descendant of Seri Teri Buana, the legendary progenitor of the Malacca kings, and the last ruler of Malacca to have the blood of true royalty. Raja Ali Haji, *The Precious Gift (Tuhfat al-Nafis),* translated by Barbara Watson Andaya and Virginia Matheson (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1982), 1.

[8] Virginia Matheson ed., *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (Kuala Lumpur: Fajar Bakti, 1982), xiv-xv. See also *Hikayat Johor serta Pahang,* National Archive of Malaysia. Johor Baharu Branch, 5. Leonard Y. Andaya, "Raja Kechil and The Minangkabau Conquest of Johore in 1718", *JMBRAS* 45, part II (1972), 51-52, 73-74. Buyong Adil, *Sejarah Pahang* (Kuala Lumpur: DBP, 1984), 90-91. E. Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak 1602 tot 1865* (*Belanda Di Johor dan Siak 1602-1865)*, translated by Wan Ghalib (Batavia: Bruining & Wijt, 1870), Appendix VII, XX .

Abdul Jalil Rahmat Shah (1718-1722) after seizing the throne of Sultan Abdul Jalil IV in 1718.[9] Raja Sulaiman, the son of Sultan Abdul Jalil IV was unhappy and sought help from five Bugis brothers who were mercenaries, namely Daing Parani,[10] Daing Marewah, Daing Cellak, Daing Kemasi and Daing Menambun[11], to defeat Raja Kechil. He compensated them for their assistance and also bestowed upon them important positions, such as *Yang Dipertuan Muda* (viceroy). He also gave full political control of the Riau-Lingga areas to the Bugis leader Daing Marewah.[12] So from the beginning of the eighteenth century, the first generation of Bugis played an important role in the political affairs of the region. They also successfully expanded their influence within the state (Johor, Pahang, Southwest Borneo, Selangor, Linggi, Langat, Siak, Kedah, Perak, and Terengganu),[13] controlled all important trade and maintained their power for the first fifty years of their dominance.[14]

In 1783-84, a long series of battles between Riau and Dutch forces[15] occurred during which Raja Haji[16] who was the fourth *Yang*

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[9] Dianne Lewis, *The Dutch East India Company and the Straits of Malacca 1700-1784: Trade and Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (PhD Thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 1970), 151.

[10] 'Daing' or 'Daeng' is a title used in south-west Sulawesi for high and low nobility.

[11] For further information on Bugis genealogy, see A. Samad Ahmad (ed.), *Kerajaan Johor-Riau* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1985), 1-25.

[12] Mohd Yusof Md. Nor (ed.), *Salasilah Melayu dan Bugis* (Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti, 1984), 2-3. See V. Matheson (ed.), *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, xiv-xvi.

[13] Leonard Y. Andaya, "The Bugis-Makasar Diasporas", *JMBRAS* LXVII, part 1 (1995), 119-138.

[14] Carl A. Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johore and Singapore 1784-1885* (Kent Ridge: Singapore University Press, 1979), 12.

[15] CO 273/1, A Retrospect of British Policy in the Straits of Malacca, Part II.

[16] Usually 'Haji' is a title given to a Muslim who has performed *Hajj* (pilgrimage) to Makkah. According to Raja Malik, Raja Haji never performed the *Hajj*. However, he was called Raja Haji because his real name was Aji (Raja Aji). The first person in Penyengat Island to perform *hajj* was his son, Raja Ahmad (father of Raja Ali Haji). Interview with Raja Malik bin Raja Hamzah, Penyengat Island, Riau, 24 December 2014. He is

Dipertuan Muda of Riau died at Teluk Ketapang.[17] In 1800, Sultan Mahmud III[18] invited Raja Ali back to Riau and re-installed him as the *Yang Dipertuan Muda* after he fled to Borneo in 1784 to escape a Dutch military offensive against Riau.[19] The marriage of Sultan Mahmud III and Raja Hamidah (Ungku Putri), daughter of Raja Haji, in 1804 created a new alliance between the Bugis and the Malay Sultan. The small island of Penyengat[20] was given to Raja Hamidah and Raja Haji's descendants as a wedding present from the Sultan.[21]

Picture 1: The Island of Penyengat (The Island of Mars)

Source: Personal Picture, 2014.

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one of the descendants of Raja Ali Haji.

[17] The first *Yang DiPertuan Muda* of Johor State, was Daing Marewah (1721-28), the second was Daing Chellak (1728-45), the third was Daing Kemboja (1745-1777) and Raja Haji was the fourth (1777-1784). Raja Haji was killed in 1784 at Teluk Ketapang fighting the Dutch. Abu Hassan Sham, *Syair-syair Melayu Riau* (Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur, 1995), 30.

[18] Sultan Mahmud III (1761-1812) was the Malay ruler of Johor state, Pahang, Riau and all the island of Johor-Riau-Lingga. After giving Riau to the Bugis, he established his own court to the south on the island of Lingga.

[19] Raja Ali was appointed as the fifth *Yang DiPertuan Muda of Riau* after the death of Raja Haji at Teluk Ketapang. Letter from Governor General to the committee of private court, 26 January 1786, M.1/78, Straits Settlement Factory Records (G.134), 1752-1802. See also letter from Bengal dated 23 Ogos 1784, M.1/78, Straits Settlement Factory Records (G.134), 1752-1802. Thomas Forest, *Voyage from Calcutta to the Mergui Archipelago* (London: J. Robson, New Bond-Street, 1792), British Library London. See also letter enclosed by Kapten Francis Light to Gavernor, M.1/78, Straits Settlement Factory Records (G.134), 1752-1802.

[20] The island of Penyengat is about 3½ km long and was called as 'the island of mars'

[21] Matheson (ed.), *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, 255.

In 1787, Sultan Mahmud together with his followers moved out of Riau because of the Dutch invasion. He had built his palace at Lingga and agreed that the Bugis would rule Riau from Penyengat while the Malays would rule Lingga.[22] With the presence of the British[23] in Singapore, they tried to establish a separate kingdom in Johor for the Temenggong.[24] In 1818, the Bugis and the Malays in Riau-Lingga signed a treaty with the Dutch which gave the latter veto power in the appointment of a new Sultan, and the right to bring their warships into the kingdom and to maintain a 'Resident' in Tanjung Pinang. From 1818 the position of the Bugis in the Johor kingdom[25] became limited, but the Bugis elites began to promote and establish the Island of Penyengat[26] as a centre of literature and religious studies.[27]

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[22] Enclosed letter from Captain Francis Light to Governor General, Fort William, M. 2/1978, Straits Settlement Factory Records, Indian Office Library, vol. 2 (G.134), 1787-1791.

[23] The British strengthened their power in the Malay Archipelago around the seventeenth century and dominated half of the Malay areas. At that time the British had the intention to dominate Singapore and appointed Tengku (Prince) Hussain (the eldest son of Sultan Mahmud III) as King of Johor State. In 1824, prior to certain agreements, Tengku Hussain declared Singapore to be under the control of the British and Colonel Farquhar was appointed as the first 'resident' in Singapore. SP 12, 125/18, Proceeding of Straits Settlements by Orfeur Cavenagh, Governor of Straits Settlements, 20 October 1863: 70-71. See also CO 275/5, Letter to Secretary of Government in India (Charles Wood), 8 December 1862 and letter from Syed Omar to Governor of Straits Settlements, Colonel Orfeur Cavenagh, 22 July 1861. Refer to CO 273/6, Letter from Governor of Straits Settlements, Colonel Orfeur Cavenagh, 11 November 1862.

[24] 'Temenggong' is an official title in Malacca-Johor, the minister ranking second in the state after the Bendahara (minister of the kingdom). Agreement between Stamford Raffles and Sultan Hussain Muhammad Shah and Dato' Temenggung Abdul Rahman in 11 Rabiulakhir 1234 (6 February 1819). CO 273/97, Title and Position of the Maharajah of Johore.

[25] Jan Frederick Gerrit Brumund, *Schetsen eener mailreize van Batavia naar Maastricht op reis en thuis,* Batavia, 1862, G. Kolff, folio 15.

[26] Penyengat Island is a small island located opposite Tanjung Pinang in the Riau Archipelago. Tanjung Pinang is a small city of Bintan Island.

[27] Timothy P. Barnard, "Taman Penghiburan: Entertainment and the Riau Elite in the Late 19th century", *JMBRAS* LXVII, part 2 (Disember 1994), 21.

Landscape of Historiography and Literary Works on Penyengat Island

In the nineteenth century, Malay historiography and literary activities flourished in Penyengat Island [28] which became the most influential centre for literary activities. There were many factors accounting for the flourishing of literary works in Penyengat.

The first was the religious factor. Because of their Islamic background, some of the Riau rulers were interested in writing their own books based on Islamic principles. Among those who contributed literary works were Raja Jaafar (1805-1831), Raja Ali bin Raja Jaafar (1844-1857), Raja Abdullah bin Raja Jaafar (1857-1858), and Raja Muhammad Yusuf bin Raja Ali (1858-1899). They knew the importance of knowledge and wanted to supervise literary activities in the nineteenth century. Religious teachers were brought in from outside to teach Islamic principles in mosques and palaces. Among those invited to Riau to teach Islam during the rule of Raja Jaafar were Abdul Wahab from Minangkabau, Abdul Rasyid and Syed Syeikh.

During the rule of Raja Haji Abdullah, Syeikh Ismail from Makkah was invited to teach Islam and strengthen the Naqsyabandiah Sufi group in Riau. During the rule of Raja Abdul Rahman, Habib Syeikh al-Syaqaff, Syed Hasan al-Hadad, Kiai Beranjang, Haji Syahabuddin ibn Syeikh Muhammad Arsyad al-Banjari, Haji Abu Bakar Bugis and Syeikh Ahmad Jibrati were invited to Riau. They were also responsible for the construction of Raya Mosque on Penyengat Island (11 February 1834) which is still in use today.[29] The other religious teachers who came to Riau to teach Islam were Tuan Syahab al-Din and Tuan Haji Abd al-Wahab. With the existence of many religious teachers, the rulers and their advisors could deepen their knowledge of Islam.

The second factor was related to Yamtuan Ahmadi's Library which was built on the initiative of Raja Muhammad Yusuf.[30] At the

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[28] "The Riau-Lingga archipelago is the chain of islands located to the south of Singapore and the eastern of coast of Sumatra". *Ibid.*,18.

[29] See Abu Hassan Sham, *Syair-Syair Melayu Riau*, 31.

[30] Raja Muhammad Yusuf was the ruler of Riau from 1858-1899. During his period, literary works, especially Islamic literature, were produced by a large number of

time, the library, which contained a large number of Arabic and Malay works, was considered to be the biggest library in the Malay Archipelago. Raja Muhammad Yusuf also took the initiative to buy books from Egypt and India. Among the books in the library were *Bidayat al-Hidayah, Minhaj al-'Abidin, Ihya 'Ulum al-Din, Nasihat al-Muluk, Umm al-Barahin* (written by al-Sanusi), *Jawharat al-Tawhid* (written by Ibrahim al-Lakani), and the writings of Abdul Rauf, al-Zawzani, al-Samarkandi and Raja Ali Haji.[31] The existence of the library encouraged the people of Riau to enhance their knowledge and to produce many literary works.

The third factor was the existence of a printing press on Penyengat Island. The printing press was previously used to publish Dutch magazines in Batavia (now Jakarta). Some of the handwritten texts printed by the press were the writings of Raja Ali Haji[32] (before and after his death) such as *Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk* and *Gurindam Dua Belas*, *Syair Kitab al-Nikah*, *Syair Suluh Pegawai* and *Syair Sinar Gemala Mastika Alam* etc.[33] Dutch officials also took the opportunity to collect and publish the works of the Riau elites for personal reasons or on specific instructions from Batavia. For example, H.T von de Wall published the dictionary compiled by Raja Ali Haji and Haji Ibrahim b. Syahbandar Abdullah. H.C. Klinkert collected over ninety manuscripts during his two and a half year-stay in Riau. Elisa Netscher, the Resident of Riau, collected, transcribed, translated and published a large number of Malay works in Dutch journals.[34]

The fourth factor was the interest of the Bugis rulers in Makassar in keeping their own diaries which recorded all the events that happened in the empire such as treaties, deaths, earthquakes,

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writers in Riau, including Raja Ali Haji, *Ibid.*, 45-46.

[31] Matheson, *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, 593-594.

[32] Raja Ali Haji was the most prolific writer on the island of Penyengat in the nineteenth century.

[33] *'Syair'* is similar to poem. Most of the *syair* are related to the Islamic principles and the conduct of Muslim rulers. Abu Hassan Sham, *Syair-Syair Melayu Riau*, 41.

[34] Barbara Watson Andaya and Virginia Matheson, "Islamic Thought and Malay Tradition: The Writings of Raja Ali Haji of Riau (ca. 1809-1870)" in Anthony Reid and David Marr (eds.), *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann, 1978), 108-128.

wars and battles. Their intention was to preserve their history in the best possible manner for future generations to know what happened in the past.[35] The Bugis rulers who became advisors and patrons of literary works in Riau maintained this tradition and encouraged their people to produce as many works as possible. Raja Abdullah[36] for example, wrote poems such as *Syair Qahar Mashyur*, *Syair Syarkan*, *Syair Dusaman* and *Syair Madhi*. After the death of Raja Abdullah, literary activities, especially the writing of *syair*, were fully monopolised by Bugis families among whom were Raja Ahmad[37] and his son, Raja Ali Haji who later became a famous writer.[38]

The fifth factor was the existence of the Rusydiah Club in the late nineteenth century after the death of Raja Ali Haji. This club was established by a group of intellectuals and people with power and authority in Riau. Besides literature, the members of the club were inclined towards political and social activities. Many books were produced and translated, increasing the number of books in Riau. For example, Raja Khalid Raja Hasan who was known as Raja Khalid Hitam,[39] produced *Bahawa inilah Perjalanan Sultan Lingga* (The Journey of Lingga's King), *Yang Dipertuan Muda Riau Pergi ke-Singapura* (The Visits of the Riau's Viceroy to Singapore) and *Thamarat al-Matlub fi Anwari'l-Qulub* (The Desired Fruits within the Lights of the Hearts).[40] One of the few documents written by Rusydiah Club members was *Taman Penghiburan* (The Garden of Leisure) which described the Muslim holiday of *Aidilfitri* in 1896.[41]

From the above factors it may be seen that the people of Riau

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[35] Abu Hassan Sham, *Syair-Syair Melayu Riau,* 51-52 and 211.

[36] Raja Abdullah, the son of Raja Jaafar, became the leader and patron of the Naqsyabandiah group in Riau. See Matheson, *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, 593-594.

[37] Raja Ahmad was a son of Daing Chelak and became an official in the Riau court. He was the first prince from Riau to perform hajj. *Ibid.,* 540-551.

[38] Timothy P. Barnard, "Taman Penghiburan: Entertainment and the Riau Elite in the Late 19th century", 23.

[39] Raja Khalid Hitam was one of Raja Hassan's sons and became a member of the Rusydiah Club. He was sent by the Syeikh al-Hadi (leader of the Club) to get assistance from the King of Japan to fight the Dutch but he died when he reached Japan. Abu Hassan Sham, "Rusydiah Kelab dan Taman Penghiburan", 35, 39.

[40] Abu Hassan Sham, *Syair-Syair Melayu Riau*, 47.

[41] Timothy P. Barnard, "Taman Penghiburan: Entertainment and the Riau Elite in the Late Nineteenth century", 1-2.

were at various stages of literary development and were aware of the importance of knowledge, especially with regard to religion, history, literature and politics. Through this development Penyengat Island became the centre of Islamic culture and literature and Malay intellectual life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Raja Ali Haji and His Works

Raja Ali Haji b. Raja Ahmad, grandson of Raja Haji, was one of the two great Malay writers of the nineteenth century.[42] It is not clear when his date of birth was, as it is not mentioned in any of his works. However, *Tuhfat al-Nafis* has mentioned that he performed *Hajj* on *Sha'ban* 1243 (February 1828) when he was nineteen years old.[43] Therefore, it may be inferred that his date of birth was around 1808/1809. Besides, scholars differ on the year of his death. Maxwell mentions 1887 at the age of 78, Abu Hassan Sham 1870, Mohammad Anas 1871-72, Virginia 1872, Jan van der Putten and al-Azhar after 1872. Through Raja Ali Haji's letters to von de Wall, it appears the last letter sent was on 31 December 1872. Since Wall had died on 2 May 1873 and there were no more letters or writings of Raja Ali Haji after 1873, it may be assumed that he died in the same year.[44]

Raja Ali Haji was an aristocrat of Bugis descent, born and bred at the court of the *Yang Dipertuan Muda* of the Johor-Riau Empire in 1809. He later became advisor to the *Yang Dipertuan Muda* for over forty years during the ruling period of his cousins Raja Abdul Rahman (1831-1844), Raja Ali (1844-1857), Raja Abdullah

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[42] The other one was Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munshi, known as Abdullah Munshi, who was famous for his work in 1838 entitled *Pelayaran Abdullah Munshi* (Voyage of Abdullah Munshi). See H.F.O'B. Traill, "An Indian Pratagonist of the Malay Language: Abdullah Munshi, His Race and his-Mother-Tongue" in *Journal of The Malaysian Branch of The Royal Asiatic Society* (*JMBRAS*) LII, part 2 (1979); and "The "Lost" Manuscript of The Hikayat Abdullah 'Munshi' " *in JMBRAS* LV, part 2 (1982).

[43] V. Matheson, *Tuhfat al-Nafis: Sejarah Melayu-Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991), 44-45.

[44] Abu Hassan Sham, *Puisi-Puisi Raja Ali Haji,* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1993), 86. Jan van der Putten dan al-Azhar, *Dalam Berkekalan Persahabatan: Surat-surat Raja Ali Haji kepada von de Wall* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2002), xx.

(1857-1858) and his cousin's son Raja Muhammad Yusuf (1858-1899). Being a state advisor, he also played three other important roles, that of judge, ulama and man of letters.[45]

Most of his family members were interested in literature and produced many books which were written in the Arabic-Malay script. His father, Raja Ahmad, an intellectual and the most influential person in Riau, wrote *Syair Ungku Puteri* (The Poem of Ungku Puteri), and *Syair Perang Johor* (The Poem of Johor's Wars). *Syair Ungku Puteri* was the first poem produced by Raja Ahmad that contained historical elements. It is about the journey of Ungku Hamidah (Ungku Puteri) from Penyengat to Lingga to visit his brother *Yang Dipertuan Muda* Raja Jaafar (1805-1831). The name of *Syair Perang Johor*'s name is not mentioned, but since it was found together with *Syair Ungku Puteri*, some historians conclude that it was written by Raja Ahmad. *Syair Perang Johor* also has some historical elements, since it describes the wars between Johor and the Acehnese in the seventeenth century.[46] On the basis of these works, Raja Ahmad is considered to be the first to conceive a great epic which narrated the history of the Bugis in the Malay World and their relationship with the Malay kings.

Raja Ahmad was an ambitious father who wanted his son to be knowledgeable. When Raja Ali Haji was nineteen years old, his father sent him to Makkah to further his religious studies. When he came back from Makkah, he started writing books on Islamic principles, history, politics, literature and poetry; and he recruited Islamic teachers for Riau. At the age of thirty-two, Raja Ali Haji was appointed as religious advisor in the court of Raja Ali Jaafar. [47]

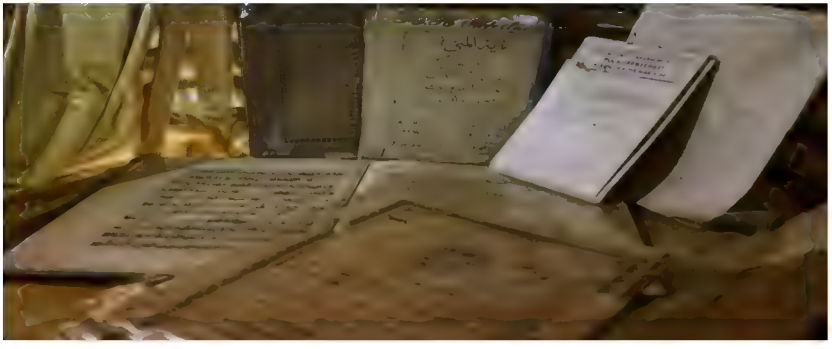
In the nineteenth century, Penyengat Island not only became the centre of literary activities but also of Islamic culture. Raja Ali Haji was assigned to bring other religious teachers such as Syed Abdullah Bahrain to Penyengat Island to teach him and the government officials about Islamic religious knowledge and the Quran. Besides being exposed to *Bidayat al-Hidayah, Minhaj*

[45] A list of Malay literary works in the Riau Archipelago in the 19th century can be found in Abu Hassan Sham, *Syair-Syair Melayu Riau*, 351-358.
[46] *Ibid.*, 51-53.
[47] V. Matheson, *Tuhfat al-Nafis: Sejarah Melayu-Islam,* 540-551.

al-'Abidin, Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, Nasihat al-Muluk and *Umm al-Barahin*, he also had the opportunity to study the Muhammadiyyah Tariqa, the book of Sanusi and others from the great scholar Tuan Sheikh Ismail from Jawa.[48]

Raja Ali Haji's Islamic historical and literary works are numerous among which are *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (The Precious Gift), *Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis dan Sekalian Raja-rajanya* (Genealogy of Malay and Bugis Princes), *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* (The Benefits of Religious Duties), *Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa* (The Book of Linguistic), *Bustan al-Katibin* (The Garden of Writers), *Gurindam Dua Belas* (The Twelve Aphorism), *Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk* (The Poem of Sultan Abdul Muluk), *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Waza'if al-Mulk* (Introduction to the Systematic Arrangement of the Duties of the Ruler), *Syair Kitab al-Nikah* (The Poem of Marriage Laws), *Syair Siti Sianah* (The Poem of Siti Sianah), *Syair Hukum Faraidh* (The Poem of Inheritance Laws), *Syair Nasihat* (The Poem of Counselling) and *Syair Sinar Gemala Mastika Alam*.[49]

Picture 2: Writings of Raja Ali Haji in the Collection of Raja Malik, Penyengat Island, Riau.



Source: Personal Picture, 2014

His works can generally be divided into four categories: history, politics, language and literature. Among his historical writings,

[48] *Ibid.*, 610, 613-614.

[49] Most of these writings were widely read, copied, and also printed at a local printing press.

Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis and *Tuhfat al-Nafis*[50] are the most famous. It should be noted here that *Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis* was written at about the same time as *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (1865). In fact, some of the content of *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, especially the earlier sections, were taken from *Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis*.

In both *Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis* and *Tuhfat al-Nafis,*[51] Raja Ali Haji describes his pride of his Bugis heritage, status and the distinctive way of life.[52] In the early part of both accounts, he illustrates the role of the five Bugis brothers (five Daings) who came to the Malay World and expanded their influence. He also mentions the role played by the Bugis and the Malays in this region as well as the close relationship between these two peoples. Moreover, he deals with the wider scope of Islamic matters, the unity of religious principles, political wisdom and Bugis relations with the Dutch up to his own time. He also explains the historical events in the Johor, Riau and Lingga areas. One can surmise that perhaps his goal was to preserve the unique identity and history of the Bugis people.

Some scholars believe there are some similarities between *Tuhfat al-Nafis* and *Hikayat Negeri Johor* (History of Johor State) due to the former using the latter as a major source. *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, however, took only brief accounts from *Hikayat Negeri Johor,*[53] and had, besides the Bugis genealogies, referred to historical events and experiences in the wars. In fact, Raja Ali also used *Sejarah Riau* (History of Riau), *Sejarah Pontianak* (History of Pontianak), *Sejarah Trengganu* (History of Trengganu), *Sejarah Selangor* (History of Selangor), *Sejarah Lingga* (History of Lingga) *Sejarah Siak* (History of Siak), and perhaps also *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals).[54]

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[50] Scholars like Virginia Matheson say that the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* was a joint effort, commenced by Raja Ahmad and enlarged by Raja Ali Haji. In fact, many of the materials were taken from *Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis*, written by Raja Ali Haji. V. Matheson, *Tuhfat al-Nafis*: *Sejarah Melayu Islam*, 36.

[51] Both works were printed in Singapore.

[52] J.M Gullick, "A History of Malayan History (to 1939)," *JMBRAS* LXXI, part 2, 1998): 91-121.

[53] The similarities are with regard to event in Selangor, Perak, Linggi and Melaka. See Muhd Yusuf Ibrahim and Mahayuddin Yahaya, *Sejarawan dan Pensejarahan: Ketokohan dan Karya* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1988), 257.

[54] V. Matheson, *Tuhfat al-Nafis-Sejarah Melayu Islam,* 272, 371-373, 400, 419.

Although he did not mention using *Sejarah Melayu* as a source, scholars agree that the early part of his writings very much resembles *Sejarah Melayu*.[55]

As modern historians, we may argue that Raja Ali Haji was critical of his sources. He believed in the importance of history and historical writing. Besides using the mentioned sources, he also made use of oral history when it was available. As a member of the Johor-Riau royal family and having a good position as advisor to the *Yang Dipertuan Muda*, he used the opportunity to interact with scholars from the royal family of the Johor Riau states, Terengganu and Selangor.[56] Moreover, he also gained access to the palace archives and had a chance to see important state records, Malay and Bugis chronicles, official letters such as the letters from Francis Light, agreements etc. Because of this, in *Tuhfat al-Nafis* he could state the dates[57] of every important event which happened at the same time.[58] All these sources provided him with facts and a better understanding of the past, giving him confidence to compile a history of Bugis involvement in the Malay World, particularly in the Johor state.[59] If he did not have actual evidence, he would mention that he was ignorant; for example, he states that he did not know the history

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[55] The first part of the *Tuhfat* was about Raja Seri Teri Buana – the first Malay ruler who hailed from Bukit Siguntang, Sumatera and came to Palembang, Bentan and established his kingdom in Singapore-an account which also appears in the *Sejarah Melayu*. A Samad Ahmad (ed.), *Sulalatus Salatin* (*Sejarah Melayu*), Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1996), 19-41.

[56] J.A. Lent and K. Mulliner (eds.) *Malaysian Studies: Archaeology, Historiography, Geography and Bibliography*, Monograph series on Southeast Asia (Northern Illinois University: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), 91.

[57] In the *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, he mentioned the exact date of his writing. "...it was the year one thousand two hundred and eighty-two after the hijra of the Prophet (May Allah bless him and grant him peace), on the third day of *Sha'ban* the Majestic, that my heart was roused to produce this book". See Raja Ali Haji, *The Precious Gift (Tuhfat al-Nafis),* 12.

[58] Muhd Yusuf Ibrahim and Mahayuddin Yahaya, *Sejarawan dan Pensejarahan: Ketokohan dan Karya,* 257-258.

[59] R.O. Winstedt, "Malay Chronicles from Sumatra and Malaya", in D.G.E. Hall ed., *Historians of South East Asia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 27. See also R.O. Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), 165.

of the first Bugis ruler who originated from Sitti Mallangkik, the queen of the country called Luwu'. Although some Bugis traditions assumed that she was descended from Balqis, Queen of Saba' who married Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) and came to the Bugis lands, Raja Ali Haji said that Allah Almighty knew best.[60]

Raja Ali Haji can be considered as the first Malay historian to introduce the writing of history based on 'what actually happened'.[61] For example in his *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, he stated his purpose:

> "If in the future any of my descendants wish to add anything to this chronicle, they may. However, it must be done well, written lucidly and correctly, and set out in accordance with the facts, so that it can be followed and in order that it may be used till the passing of our time and days."[62]

It is clear that as a person with a historical consciousness he advised his descendants to describe historical events in a correct manner. They must present accurate facts and records in their works in order to avoid speculation and fabrication. Although there is no evidence to show Raja Ali Haji had been influenced by the ideas of Leopold von Ranke or Ibn Khaldun, his method of using facts, real events and exact dates indicates his thinking which was far ahead of previous Malay writers.

As a Muslim, Raja Ali also believed in the concept of *taqdir* (God's will) when he described the causes of Riau's misfortune and destruction. For example, he mentioned in *Tuhfat al-Nafis*:

> ...Yang Dipertuan Muda Raja Haji had been governing Riau...when the decree of Allah Almighty, who is all-

[60] Raja Ali Haji, *The Precious Gift* (*Tuhfat al-Nafis*), 25-26.

[61] This word 'what actually happened' was popularised by Leopold von Ranke, the founder of modern European historiography in the early 19th century. Besides Ibn Khaldun, Ranke was the first historian in Europe to cultivate primary sources including the organisation of sources and the critical evaluation of historical studies. He insisted that historians must be unbiased and must work out what actually happened. T.R. Tholfsen, *Historical Thinking: An Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row), 160-161.

[62] Raja Ali Haji, *The Precious Gift* (*Tuhfat al-Nafis*), 308. V. Matheson, *Tuhfat al-Nafis-Sejarah Melayu Islam,* 654.

> powerful came into force. He executes His will with His profound wisdom over all His servants, reminding them of the cruelty of this impermanent world and of the uncertainty of its pleasures...[63]

From this statement, Raja Ali Haji seemed to believe that God had preordained the destruction, and that as a Muslim he should accept God's Will. But he also admitted that human failings were the basic cause behind the tribulations and conflicts visited upon Riau.

Tuhfat al-Nafis and *Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis* are valuable sources on Malay history because these books not only give a view of the Johor-Riau empire and interesting accounts of the surrounding areas, but also give a clear vision of Islamic thought. Moreover, *Tuhfat al-Nafis* also clearly shows the life of the Bugis people, trade, court life, Bugis ceremonies etc. Because of the abundant historical materials on Johor, Riau and Lingga areas contained in these two books, Winstedt classified *Tuhfat al-Nafis* as the second greatest source of Malay history after *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals).[64] Apparently, this statement contradicts with his condescending view of Malay history. Perhaps the statement indirectly shows that he was confused, whether to endorse the negative views of other colonial scholars or to recognise Malay works as important in containing facts and truth. After some research was done, he had to recognise *Sejarah Melayu* as the most important literature and Raja Ali Haji as "one of the greatest Malay writers of the nineteenth century". Furthermore, Maxwell in his article on Raja Haji classified *Tuhfat al-Nafis* as "...an interesting historical work...".[65]

Raja Ali Haji is also known as a great political thinker of the nineteenth century. *Muqaddimah fi Intizam Wazaif al-Mulk* (1857) was written as a memorial volume on the death of his cousin *Yang Dipertuan Muda* Raja Ali b. Jaafar. As an ulama and advisor of the *Yang Dipertuan Muda,* Raja Ali Haji played an important role in

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[63] *Ibid.*

[64] R.O.Winstedt, *A History of Classical Malay Literature* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1977), 165.

[65] Muhammad Yusoff Hashim, *Pensejarahan Melayu: Kajian Tentang Tradisi Sejarah Melayu Nusantara* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992), 451.

advising his cousin to rule justly, to make a thorough investigation before passing any judgement and to check carefully all news and rumours.[66] Although it seems that these ideas have similarities with Ibn Khaldun, there is no clear evidence to show that Khaldunian ideas have influenced his writings. The idea of ruling justly, checking all news and rumors, presenting accurate facts and records in writing are general ideas in the teachings of Islam.

In *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*, his most important book, Raja Ali Haji describes the correct procedures for the appointment of a new ruler and the proper attitude and conduct of a ruler. He also discusses the establishment of a legal system based on Islamic principles, emphasising the importance of governing with justice, and of using power in the service of God's majesty. The book was important in providing a better way to practice religion for the ruler as well as creating a proper religious atmosphere in society, and Raja Ali Haji wished the ruler to put his ideal conception of Islamic kingship into practice.

Some scholars like Barbara Watson, Virginia Matheson, etc., claim that Raja Ali Haji's thought was influenced by the *Ihya' 'Ulum al-din*[67] and *Nasihat al-Muluk* (Counsel for Kings) of al-Ghazali and by *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*, of al-Mawardi's. This is perhaps due to two reasons: first, the frequency of using and referring to the *Ihya' 'Ulum al-din.*[68] Second, the similarities of some concepts of administration and kingship which exist in the *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* and in Mawardi and al-Ghazali's works. I believe that Raja Ali Haji had been influenced by al-Ghazali's works, especially *Ihya' 'Ulum al-din* and *Nasihat al-Muluk*, since these works were widely known in the Islamic countries at the end of the eighteenth century. Since al-Ghazali was considered a great scholar, Raja Ali Haji had applied his ideas in his writings.

In the sphere of language, Raja Ali Haji compiled an important

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[66] This book is not too important compared to the *Thamarat al-Muhimmah*. Abu Hassan Sham, "Karya-karya yang Berlatarbelakangkan Islam dari Pengarang Melayu Riau-Johor Sehingga Awal Abad ke Dua Puluh", 245-271.

[67] Barbara Watson Andaya and Virginia Matheson, "Islamic Thought and Malay Tradition: The Writings of Raja Ali Haji of Riau (ca. 1809-1870)", 108-128.

[68] *Ibid.*

work on the Malay language, entitled the *Bustanul-Katibin* when Raja Ali Jaafar decided that a grammar of the Malay language was needed. The compilation was done as a guide for children's writing, and some of the schools in Johor and Singapore used the book successfully. In addition, he also wrote a dictionary of Malay usage, entitled the *Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa*, which was not only an encyclopedia but also a handbook for those interested in improving their language, understanding religion and correct behavior. Both of these works were written in Malay-Arabic script, and were later transliterated into Dutch by Ph.S. van Ronkel.[69]

Some scholars like Teeuw and Za'ba belittle the capability of Raja Ali Haji, saying that his works, especially the *Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa*, are unsystematic.[70] Although his works are not encyclopedias in the proper sense they can still be considered as successful and formidable achievements in view of the fact that this form of writing had not been sufficiently developed at that time.

Raja Ali Haji also wrote on Malay poetry. His works in this category include the *Gurindam Dua Belas* (1846), *Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk*, *Syair Kitab al-Nikah*, *Syair Siti Sianah*, *Syair Hukum Faraid*, *Syair Nasihat*, and *Syair Sinar Gemala Mastika Alam*.[71] These works are related to literature and historical elements based on some Islamic principles. This is due to the influence of al-Ghazali,[72] especially his *Ihya' 'Ulum al-din* and *Bidayatul Hidayah*. For example, his *Syair Siti Sianah* is a reflection of al-Ghazali's *Bidayatul Hidayah*.

Raja Ali Haji's work, the *Gurindam Dua Belas*, was not so different from the *Thamarat al-Muhimmah* and *Muqaddimah fi Intizam*. This was because the *Gurindam* was written earlier than the *Thamarat* and the *Muqaddimah*. The contents of the *Gurindam* basically concern about the principles of Islam and the attitudes of a true Muslim. There is an assimilation of religious elements with other

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[69] *Ibid.*

[70] Harimurti Kridalaksana, "Bustanul-Katibin dan Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa: Sumbangan Raja Ali Haji Dalam Ilmu Bahasa Melayu", in *Tradisi Johor-Riau* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka), 79.

[71] Most of their writings were widely read, copied by hand and also printed at a local printing press.

[72] Ted Beardow, "Sources Used in the Compilation of the *Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis*", *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* vol. 20, no. 20 (1986): 188-155.

social aspects as Raja Ali Haji attempted to introduced Islamic principles into Malay society through literature.

Picture 3: The *Gurindam Dua Belas* has been carved on the wall of the grave complex

INILAH GURINDAM DUA BELAS
KARYA RAJA ALI HAJI
PERSIMPANAN YANG INDAH – INDAH
YAITULAH ILMU YANG MEMBERI FAEDAH
AKU HENDAK BERTUTUR
AKAN GURINDAM YANG TERATUR
GURINDAM FASAL YANG PERTAMA
GURINDAM FASAL YANG KEDUA

Source: Personal Picture, 2014

Besides Raja Ali Haji himself, his relatives also contributed much to the development of literature. For example, his own brother Raja Daud wrote the *Syair Perang Banjar Masin* and the *Asal Ilmu Tabib Melayu*, his sister Raja Saleha the *Syair Abdul Muluk*, his son, Raja Hasan the *Syair Burung*, his daughter Raja Safiah the *Syair Kumbang Mengindera* and Raja Kalthum the *Syair Saudagar Bodoh*. After the death of Raja Ahmad and Raja Ali Haji, many of Raja Ali Haji's descendants also contributed to scholarly writings, both in Malay literature and history.

The Rusydiah Club

After the death of Raja Ali Haji, his descendants formed an association known as Rusydiah Club towards the end of the nineteenth century. The term 'Rusydiah' is derived from the Arabic word "*rushd*" meaning "way" or "the right path".[73] The name of the club reflected the Islamic culture that had developed in Riau at that time.

[73] Timothy P. Barnard, "Taman Penghiburan: Entertainment and the Riau Elite in the Late 19th century", 27.

The exact date of the formation of this club is not known. However, scholars like Timothy P. Barnard affirm that, "the establishment of *Matba'at al-Riauwiyah* printing press on Penyengat in 1895 can be considered as a convenient starting date, since it published the documents … including *Taman Penghiburan*".[74] Members of the Club were among the scholars of the royal family such as Tengku Umar, Raja Khalid Hitam, Tengku Abdul Kadir, Raja Ali Kelana, Syed Syeikh al-Hadi (leader),[75] etc.

The club created and stimulated nationalistic feelings among the people within the region and was a strong influence in early twentieth century Malay politics and literature, raising many important issues concerning religion and Malay culture. It was active in the political, economic and intellectual fields and the books produced by its members included the *Risalat al-Fawaid al-Wafiat fi Syarah Ma'na al-Tahiyyat*, the *Kafiat al-Zikri 'al-Tariqat al-Naqsyabandiah*, the *Hijrah 1313*, the *Khutbah Jumaat*, the *Kanun Riau-Lingga* (The Laws of Riau-Lingga), the *Pohon Perhimpunan* (The Gathering Tree), the *Rencana Mudah bagi Mengenali Diri yang Indah*, the *Pohon Ingatan* etc.[76]

The movement was very active during the period of Raja Abdul Rahman, who was the last ruler of Riau (1884-1911). At that time, political conditions in Riau became unstable because the Dutch tried to undermine the position of the *Yang Dipertuan Muda* Riau. However, literary activities were still continued by members of the Rusydiah Club and Raja Abdul Rahman's son, Tengku Umar became the president of the Club. When the character and theme of writings began to change, the members of the Club, who started to criticise the Dutch never praised nor mentioned the kindness of the Dutch in their

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[74] *Ibid.*, 26.

[75] Syed Syeikh al-Hadi was born in Malacca around 1862 to a Malay mother and Malay Arab father of Hadhrami descent. He was sent to Penyengat at the age of fourteen, adopted by Raja Ali Kelana, grew up as a member of the Bugis elite on the island and became the leader of the Rusydiah Club. He was one of the founders of *al-Imam*, leader of the *Islah* (Islamic Reformation movement) in Malaya at that time, journalist, reformist and also writer of non-fiction. *Ibid.,* 30.

[76] Abu Hassan Sham, "Rusydiah Kelab dan Taman Penghiburan", *Purba* (Journal of Malaysian Museum Association 2, (1983): 37-44.

writings,[77] and became quite critical of the Dutch action in Riau. They argued that the Dutch were the same as other colonials who were liberal in their outlook but whose ideas, differed radically from those of the Malay-Muslims. Because of this attitude the Dutch saw the Club as a threat to their control of the Riau administration.[78]

The fall of the Riau Empire under the Dutch in 1914 brought about the termination of *Yang DiPertuan Muda*'s position in Riau and official dissolution of the Rusydiah Club. However, the literary influence of the Club continued among its members and in society as a whole. For example, Raja Ali Kelana, one of the club members, was active in Singapore in publishing *al-Imam* (The Leader), the first Islamic magazine in Malay Archipelago.[79] Also in Singapore, the Club members established a printing press, known as The Ahmadiah Press (1920) in order to continue their literary activities[80] and many of Raja Ali Haji's works were published by the Press.

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[77] Abu Hassan Sham, "Rusydiah Kelab", 37-44.

[78] Timothy P. Barnard, "Taman Penghiburan: Entertainment and the Riau Elite in the Late 19th century", 27.

[79] UU Hamidy, *Riau Sebagai Pusat Bahasa dan Kebudayaan Melayu* (Pekan Baru: Bumi Pustaka, 1983), 33. According to Ahmat Adam, *Bustan al-Arifin* was the first Malay magazine published in 1821 by Claudius Henry Thomsen, a missionary in Malacca. Between 1821-1896, there were several other Malay magazines published which have a Christian mission. According to Hamedi, the Malay real magazine that has been published was *Khizanah al-Ulum* in 1904 in Kuala Kangsar. As this magazine was no longer discovered, *al-Imam* was given credit by scholars as the first magazine published in 1906 while *Jawi Peranakan* was the first Malay newspaper published in 1876. *Al-Imam*'s first edition was printed in Matba'at Melayu (Malay Press), Tanjung Pagar Singapore on July 23, 1906 and subsequently by al-Imam Printing Company Limited. Ahmat Adam, *Sejarah dan Bibliografi Akhbar dan Majalah Melayu Abad Kesembilan Belas* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1992), 24-25. Hamedi Mohd Adnan, "Profil Majalah Melayu Sebelum Perang (1900-1941)", *Sejarah*14, no.14 (2006): 59-63. Mohamad Mokhtar Abu Hassan and Mohd. Hanafi Ibrahim (eds.), *Syed Syeikh al-Hadi: Pembaharu Semangat Islam dan Sosial* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2019), 20.

[80] At least three members from the Riau royal family, Raja Ahmad, Raja Hassan and Raja Ali were involved with al-Ahmadiah Press in Pulau Penyengat Riau had set up al-Ahmadiah Press in Jalan Sultan Singapore. Hamedi Mohd Adnan, "Penerbitan Majalah Agama Sebelum Perang Dunia Kedua: Antara Tanggungjawab Sosial dengan Perniagaan", *Sejarah* 18, no.18 (2010): 109.

Conclusion

This article has delved into Malay historiography and literary activities in the Riau Islands especially in Penyengat Island until the end of the nineteenth century focusing on the writings of Raja Ali Haji. After the death of Raja Ali Haji, the Rusydiah Club also has contributed to nationalistic and religious consciousness especially through its literary works. It is clear that the Penyengat Island has produced a large number of works in various fields.

Many works, especially the *Tuhfat al-Nafis, Silsilah Melayu dan Bugis, Gurindam Dua Belas, Kitab Pengetahuan Bahasa* and *Bustan al-Katibin,* attracted the attention of Dutch scholars who were in Riau in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They recognised the importance of the writings and used some of them in their publications, although they ignored some of the other writings, especially the poems. Perhaps, they thought that the poems were not so important compared to the encyclopedic, linguistic and historical writings. In the twentieth century, the importance of these writings, including the poems, has been fully acknowledged, and a great number of the works have been published and translated into Dutch and English, and some of the texts are now preserved in Jakarta and Leiden. The works of Raja Ali Haji and his descendants are a great contribution to Malay literature, and the legacy of Riau deserves to be studied by scholars in an extensive manner if the culture of Bugis society is to be better understood.

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